

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 518

CG 021 164

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 TITLE The Division of Labor in the Home: Who Is Doing the Work?  
 PUB DATE Apr 88  
 NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (68th, Burlingame, CA, April 28-May 1, 1988).  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; Differences; \*Employed Women; \*Sex Role; \*Sex Stereotypes; \*Spouses  
 IDENTIFIERS \*Housework; \*Unmarried Persons

ABSTRACT

Recent predictions suggest that because of the increase in the number of women acquiring gainful employment, work in the home should be divided in more egalitarian ways. Recent research, however, has shown that traditional male tasks were more likely to be shared than were traditional female tasks. This study investigated further the "superwoman" syndrome by looking at who is doing the work in the home, as well as the trend toward traditionalism. Also, the division of labor in the homes of married persons was compared to that of unmarried persons. Subjects (N=266) were asked to specify who in the household performed 24 specific chores. Unmarried subjects were asked to predict how they would expect the chores would be divided. Results from the married subjects showed that traditional male tasks were more likely to be shared than were traditional female tasks. Data from the singles showed that males expected to share some of the traditional female tasks, whereas females expected the division of labor to fall along traditional lines. Previous predictions about the trend towards egalitarian divisions of labor were not confirmed. Instead, women seemed to be experiencing the "superwoman syndrome," having it all by doing it all. (The survey instrument is appended.) (Author/ABL)

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The Division of Labor in the Home:  
Who is Doing the Work?

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Abstract

Recent predictions indicate that, because of the increase in the number of women acquiring gainful employment, work in the home should be divided in more egalitarian ways. Recent research, however, indicates that traditional male tasks are more likely to be shared than traditional female tasks. Each of 266 subjects was asked to specify who in the household performed 24 specific chores. Unmarried subjects were asked to predict how they would expect the chores would be divided. Results from the married subjects showed that traditional male tasks were more likely to be shared than traditional female tasks. Data from the singles showed that males expected to share some of the traditional female tasks, whereas females expected the division of labor to fall along traditional lines. Previous predictions about the trend towards egalitarian divisions of labor were not confirmed. Instead, women appear to be experiencing the "superwoman syndrome", having it all by doing it all.

Recent changes in employment opportunities for women, coupled with financial needs, have lead to an increase in the number of women joining the work force. Research has only recently been directed towards studying the impact of women's employment on role behavior in the home. Early studies focused on the amount of time spent on household chores. Employed married men spent approximately 1.8 hours per day on household chores, whereas, employed women spent an average of 4.1 hours per day on domestic tasks (Frieze, 1978). In the area of child care it was found that men spent an average of 14 minutes per day, whereas women spent an average of 51 minutes per day (Coverman & Sheley, 1986).

More recent work has focused on the nature of the chores done in the home. Findings indicate that household tasks are still divided

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along gender specific lines. Women take the major responsibility for dishes, cooking, and child care; men care for the car, the lawn, and general maintenance (Schafer & Keith, 1981; Krausz, 1986; Miller & Howard, 1982; Rachlin & Hansen, 1985).

More specifically, it has been shown that, as women spend more time in the work place, they spend more time on domestic chores. Furthermore, with increases in hours worked, women have reported doing more of the traditionally male tasks (Krausz, 1986).

This tendency to "do it all" by women in the work force has been termed the "superwoman syndrome" (Friedan, 1981). Friedan has defined the syndrome as the insistence of today's woman to prove that she can have it all: career, husband, children, and home. The superwoman expects to accomplish these goals with little assistance.

The current work was designed to investigate further the existence of the superwoman syndrome by looking at who is doing the work in the home, as well as the trend towards traditionalism. In addition, the division of labor in the homes of married subjects is compared to predictions about the division of labor in the home expected from subjects not currently married.

### Method

#### Subjects

Two hundred and sixty six subjects (142 female, 124 male) were recruited by students in a methodology class at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Demographic information was obtained from all subjects and is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

A Comparison of the Obtained Sample with that Obtained by Krausz (1986).

CHARACTERISTIC	OUR SAMPLE	KRAUSZ' SAMPLE
SEX	F=142 M=124	F=130
AGE	33.70 (12.5)	23 TO 42
OCCUPATION	79%	ABOUT 50%
MARITAL STATUS	M-129 S-88	M-130
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	2	1.3
HOURS WORKED	35.46	50% > 30
PARTNER'S OCCUPATION	78%	
PARTNER'S HOURS WORKED	33.52 (18.1)	

### Materials

A questionnaire, designed by Krausz (1986), to measure the division of labor in the home was used. The questionnaire was modified to include demographic information and questions about satisfaction with the division of labor in the home. In addition, the questions dealing with the initiation of emotion were omitted. Thus, the tasks listed on the survey included nine traditionally male tasks (e.g., mow the lawn), nine traditionally female tasks (e.g., wash the

dishes), and six child care tasks (e.g., diaper the baby). A copy of the questionnaire used in this study can be found in the Appendix.

### Procedures

Members of the methodology class were each asked to distribute questionnaires to at least ten acquaintances. Subjects were given a week to complete the questionnaires. All questionnaires distributed were returned. Subjects were asked to complete the demographic information and were then asked to indicate who was primarily responsible for the 24 tasks listed on the questionnaire. The response categories were "me", "equally shared", "spouse", and "other (e.g., hired help, children)". Subjects not currently married were asked to complete the questionnaire as if they were married.

### Analyses

Because of the small number of subjects in the "widowed", "divorced", "separated" and "living together" categories, only data from "married" and "single" subjects were analyzed. Three separate dependent measures were used: who does the work (WDW), how traditional the respondent was (TRD), and who does the child care (CDC).

The responses were assigned numerical values. Responses in the "me" category were given a 3, responses in the "equally shared" column were given a 2, and responses in the "spouse" column were given a 1. Tasks done by others were not included in the analyses. For each subject, the average amount of work done (WDW) was calculated by adding up the numbers assigned to each task and dividing by the number of tasks not done by others.

The traditional score was also an average of the number assigned to each task. The number assignment, however, was dependent on the sex of the respondent. Females were given a 3 if they indicated they performed a traditionally female task (e.g., mopping floors); they were also given a 3 if they indicated that their spouse performed a traditionally male task (e.g., painting the house). The reverse was true for males.

No child care tasks were included in the calculation of the WDW score or the TRD score. The child care score was calculated in the same manner as the WDW score, however, the averages were based only on the six child care tasks.

### Results

Means for the three dependent measures for single and married subjects are shown in Table 2. Three separate analyses of variance were done comparing sex to marital status for each of the dependent measures.

Table 2

Mean WDW, TRD, and CDC scores by gender and marital status.

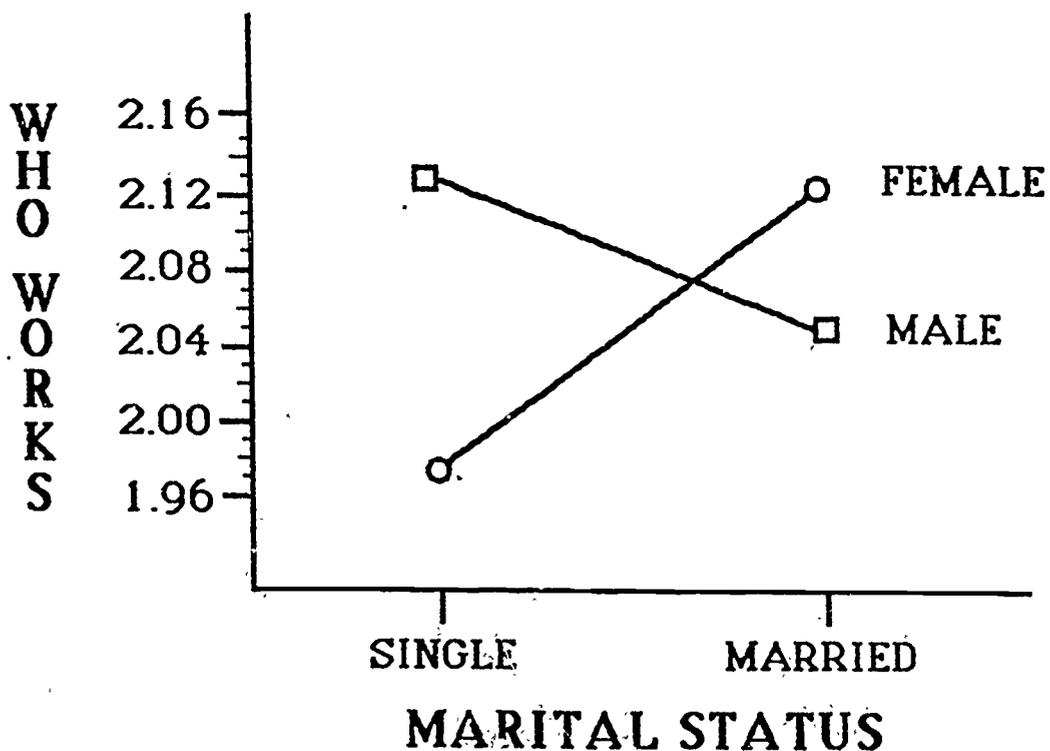
Measure	Single		Married	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Who Does the Work?	1.99	2.14	2.11	2.06
How Traditional?	2.43	2.49	2.45	2.53
Child Care Tasks?	2.35	1.64	2.33	1.35

Who Does the Work?

An analysis of the WDW scores indicated no main effect of sex ( $F(1,219) = .49, p > .05$ ). Overall, males and females reported doing equal amounts of work. There was also no main effect of marital status ( $F(1,219) = .47, p > .05$ ). Single subjects expect to do as much work in the home as married subjects report they are doing. There was, however, a significant interaction ( $F(1,219) = 6.93, p < .05$ ). Single males expect to do more work than married males report doing, and single females expect to do less work than married females report doing (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

EXPECTATION VERSUS REALITY  
WHO DOES THE WORK

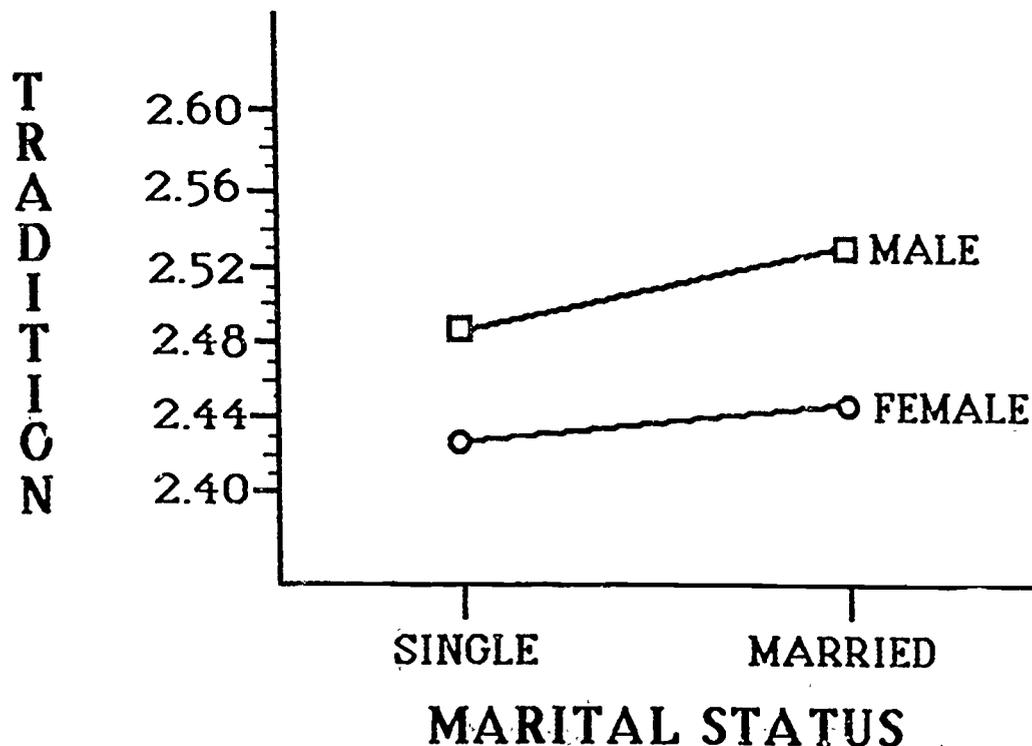


How Traditional is the Respondent?

An analysis of the TRD scores also indicated no main effect of sex ( $F(1,219) = 3.42, p < .06$ ). The trend, however, is for males to be more traditional than females. There was also no main effect of marital status ( $F(1,219) = .55, p > .05$ ). Single and married subjects expect to be equally traditional, with the overall trend leaning towards traditionalism (i.e., scores closer to 3). There was also no interaction ( $F(1,219) = p < .06$ ). Both single and married subjects scores report a traditional division of labor in the home with males being slightly more traditional than females (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

EXPECTATION VERSUS REALITY  
TRADITIONAL DIVISION

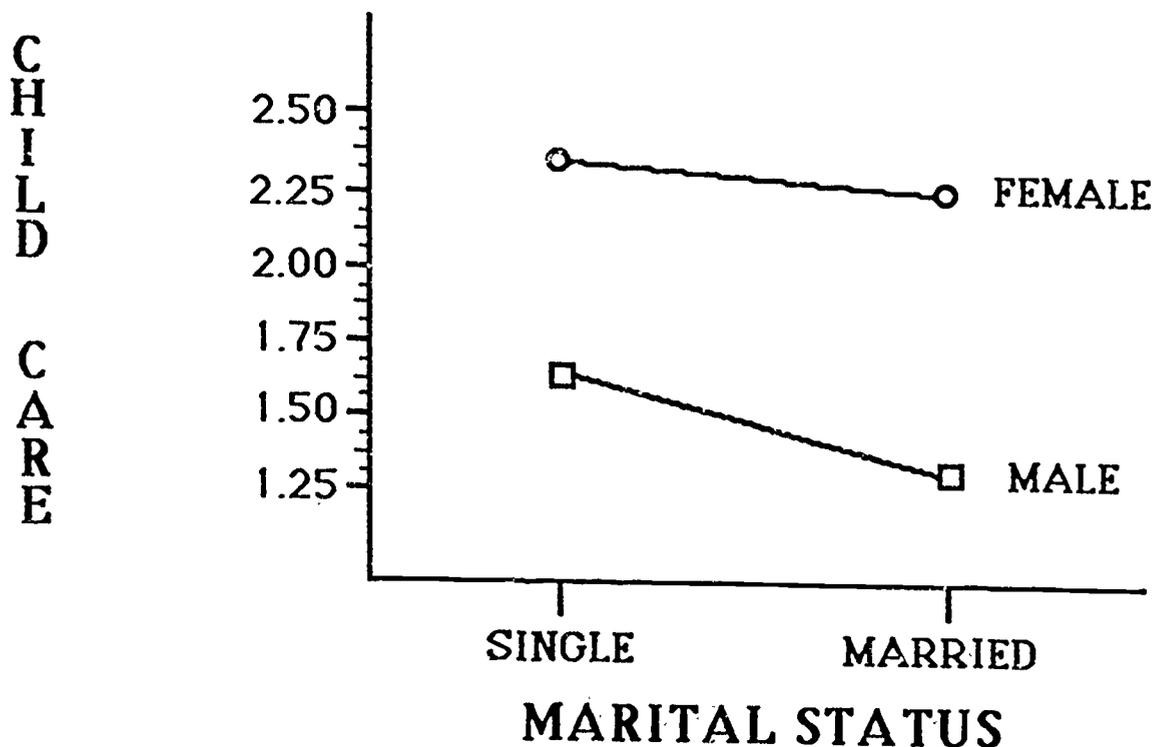


Who Does the Child Care?

An analysis of the CDC scores indicated the expected main effect of sex ( $F(1,219) = 59.26, p < .05$ ). Females are doing all of the child care tasks. There was, however, no main effect of marital status ( $F(1,219) = 3.33, p < .06$ ). The trends in the data, however, indicate that single subjects expect to do more child care tasks than married subjects report doing. This trend, can be seen more clearly in the nearly significant sex by marital status interaction, and is carried by the single males who expect to participate more in child care tasks than their married counterparts ( $F(1,219) = 2.70, p < .10$ ) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

**EXPECTATION VERSUS REALITY  
CHILD CARE**



## Discussion

### Overall Findings

The results indicate that the superwoman syndrome is alive and well, particularly in the area of child care. Women continue to engage in a fair amount of work around the home and are responsible for nearly all of the child care, despite increases in work outside the home. In addition, the division of labor continues to fall along traditional gender lines, with males doing more traditional chores than females. These findings support the work done by Krausz (1986), though, further analyses need to be done to investigate the relationship between number of hours worked outside the home by the woman and the tendency for traditionalism reported by both males and females.

One of the most interesting findings concerns the expectations of people not yet sharing domestic responsibilities. Single males expect to do more work than their married counterparts currently report doing, whereas single females expect to share more of the work than their married counterparts currently share. Furthermore, single people expect to be less traditional in the task division than their married counterparts. These more egalitarian expectations may be due to age differences as well as optimistic attitudes about being able to develop nontraditional relationships in a social environment that still tends to conform to traditional mores.

### Research in Progress

The current project is rich in data that has yet to be analyzed. Further investigations include an analysis of satisfaction scores. A

preliminary scan of the data indicates that female satisfaction scores are lower than male scores and that the female scores decrease after completing the division of labor questionnaire.

Further analyses also need to be done using occupation, level of education, age, number of hours worked, and number of children as variables that may possibly affect who does the work, how traditional the division of labor is, and who is doing the child care tasks.

In addition to completing the analyses on the data already collected, several other related projects have been started. One project, almost completed, has been designed to investigate agreement about the division of labor in the home. Married couples were asked to complete a modified version of the Krausz questionnaire. Their answers are currently being compared and the factors that influence agreement between spouses are being identified.

To follow up on the issues dealing with expectation, a study asking children of working mothers from different socio-economic backgrounds to complete the questionnaire is being conducted. The results should indicate the influence of occupation and income on expectations concerning the division of labor in the home.

To follow up on issues related to marital agreement and occupation, the division of labor questionnaire is being given to a group of professional women and their spouses. Marital satisfaction will also be measured using an extensive interview process. The role that the division of labor and traditionalism plays in marital satisfaction will be determined.

### Conclusions

Even with the continued influx of women in the work force, the superwoman syndrome thrives. Women are still trying to have it all by doing it all, despite research that suggests that men expect to share in some of the domestic responsibilities. Continued research as to the nature and causes of the superwoman syndrome may lead to the development of more egalitarian relationships and to increased satisfaction with the division of labor in the home, which, in turn, may lead to increased satisfaction with the marital relationship.

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### Author's Notes

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Demographic Information

1. AGE \_\_\_\_\_
2. SEX \_\_\_\_\_
3. OCCUPATION (including homemaker) \_\_\_\_\_
4. If you are a student, how many credit hours are you carrying this semester? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you presently employed (including homemaker)? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, how many hours per week do you work? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How long have you been married? \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTIONS:

This survey is concerned with domestic task performance between partners in the home.

7. Is your spouse employed? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, how many hours per week does he/she work? \_\_\_\_\_  
What is your spouse's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
8. If your spouse is a student, how many hours does he/she devote to schoolwork? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Have you ever discussed how tasks around the home should be divided between your spouse and yourself? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Do you and your spouse currently discuss how domestic tasks are divided between you? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Briefly describe how you and your spouse divide domestic tasks.
  
13. Indicate how satisfied you are with the division of labor in your home.

Very satisfied

Very Unsatisfied

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

Items number 1-24 below are household domestic tasks. Please indicate who is primarily responsible for the task by placing a checkmark in the appropriate column. Remember if a question does not apply to you, please answer as you believe would be the case if it did apply (e.g., who would diaper the baby if you had one). For those whose task performances are seasonal (e.g., different in the winter than in the summer) indicate an average for the year.

Who...	mostly me	Equally shared	Mostly spouse	Other (hired help, kids)
1. makes the household repairs?	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. drives car when with partner?	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. cleans the oven?	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. takes out loans or arranges for credit?	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. changes the bed linen?	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. vacuums?	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. straightens up the house?	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. washes the dishes?	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. mops the floor?	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. diapers the baby?	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. buys clothes for the children?	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. drives children to and from activities?	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. dusts the furniture?	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. pays bills when out with partner?	_____	_____	_____	_____
15. mows the lawn?	_____	_____	_____	_____
16. does the laundry?	_____	_____	_____	_____
17. bathes the children?	_____	_____	_____	_____
18. is responsible for car maintenance?	_____	_____	_____	_____
19. paints inside of house/hangs wallpaper?	_____	_____	_____	_____
20. prepares tax returns?	_____	_____	_____	_____
21. feeds children?	_____	_____	_____	_____
22. cooks?	_____	_____	_____	_____
23. changes lightbulbs?	_____	_____	_____	_____
24. gets up at night to tend children?	_____	_____	_____	_____

25. Now that you have completed the questionnaire, please indicate again how satisfied you are with the division of labor in your home.

Very satisfied

Very Unsatisfied

7

6

5

4

3

2

1